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at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman:	Mr. FUENTES IBAÑEZ (Vice-Chairman)	(Bolivia)
later:	Mr. KHOUINI (Chairman)	(Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 73: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/47/13, 576, 413, 438, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493 and 601)

1. In the absence of Mr. Khouini (Tunisia), Mr. Fuentes Ibáñez (Bolivia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

2. Mr. AL-KHATER (Qatar) said that the report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (A/47/13) described accurately the difficult circumstances and financial problems faced by the Agency as it carried out its humanitarian work.

3. During the period covered by the report many incidents had occurred in the occupied territories, with the Israeli security forces effecting incursions into UNRWA installations and threatening and assaulting members of its staff, as well as causing material damage; they had also entered clinics and hospitals, detained and searched ambulances and beaten medical personnel, in some cases confiscating their identity cards. UNRWA had protested against such acts, regarding them as a violation of its privileges and immunities, but the Israeli authorities had cited considerations of military security, in some cases without justification.

4. Such practices violated the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and gave the lie to Israel's assertion that it was the most vigorous democracy in the Middle East. In the name of what democracy was Israel hampering the Agency's work?

5. Despite the expectations aroused by the peace process, the Palestine refugees in the occupied territories still needed the Agency's services. His delegation therefore appealed to all delegations to make contributions to the UNRWA budget, urged Israel to cease hampering its work, and expressed the hope that its mandate would be extended for a further three years.

6. Mr. POSSO SERRANO (Ecuador) said that the distressing situation of thousands of Palestine refugees in the Middle East persisted, a situation which depended largely on the relations between UNRWA and the Government of the occupying Power and the authorities of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

7. A vicious circle of Israeli repression and Palestinian protests and uprisings had been created in the occupied territories, and the refugees remained extremely vulnerable, even to external developments such as the Gulf war.

8. The root of the problem was that the Palestine refugees in the Middle East had become refugees for life, even though UNRWA had been established in 1949 to provide temporary relief and assistance.

(Mr. Posso Serrano, Ecuador)

9. The peace conferences involving Israel and several Arab countries, which Ecuador welcomed and supported morally, gave grounds for hope. However, until an overall solution was found the Palestinian people would remain refugees. It was therefore important to extend the Agency's mandate for three years, entailing an obligation on the part of the international community to continue providing funds to enable UNRWA to perform its important humanitarian functions. Nevertheless, since some States had greater responsibility than others in the peace process, they had greater obligations with regard to the funding of UNRWA.

10. Mr. ABDERAHMAN (Egypt) said that the Commissioner-General's report was being considered at a historic moment. The peace process had begun about a year ago. The first series of multilateral negotiations had examined means of strengthening the cooperation among the countries of the region and solving basic common problems, including the problem of the Palestine refugees. The United Nations had been officially invited to participate in the second series of multilateral negotiations. The Organization had already taken part in the working groups on economic cooperation and the environment and would take part during the coming week in the working group on the Palestine refugees.

11. Although UNRWA had been established on a temporary basis, several resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, approved down the years, had assigned important functions to UNRWA with respect to the solution of the problem of the Palestine refugees in the Middle East. At present UNRWA was an important source of information and a means of rendering essential assistance to the Palestine refugees until a peaceful solution to the problem was found.

12. Despite the expectations aroused by the peace process, the situation in the occupied territories remained extremely serious. The Commissioner-General's report mentioned some of the measures taken by the Israeli forces of occupation, including the holding of Palestinian prisoners in jails or detention centres outside the occupied territories, the use of a large part of the occupied territories for military or civilian purposes, the restriction of the water supply and the introduction of a pass system which limited the freedom of movement of Palestinian males. Those measures ran counter to the international instruments which established the rights and duties of occupying Powers.

13. The new Government of Israel had stated its desire to achieve peace. Egypt urged it to put an end to the acts of repression described in the Commissioner-General's report, remove the restrictions on the Palestine refugees, and cease hampering the work of UNRWA. If Israel pursued a genuine change of policy, the Commissioner-General's report would describe that change.

14. His delegation had followed closely the Agency's efforts to reform its administrative and financial structure and improve the efficiency of its programmes, especially with respect to emergency situations. Egypt shared the concern expressed by the Commissioner-General that, as a result of the

(Mr. Abderahman, Egypt)

participation of the United Nations in costly humanitarian missions in many different parts of the world, from 1993 the resources allocated to UNRWA would decline. Even the UNRWA regular budget for 1992 had not been fully funded. Furthermore, as the number of Palestinians in the occupied territories had been increasing, UNRWA would not be able to maintain the present level of programme implementation unless larger contributions were made to its budget. That was an issue which should be taken up by the working group on the financing of UNRWA.

15. Egypt hoped that the day would come when the Agency's work was no longer needed and the Palestinian people could exercise its right to self-determination. Until that goal was achieved the Agency would continue to perform a necessary function.

16. Mr. Khouini (Tunisia) took the Chair.

17. Mr. MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that the Holy See was deeply concerned about the people who lived in the Holy Land, a land that had a unique sacred character for Jews, Christians and Muslims and formed an integral part of their religious patrimony. In his address of 11 January 1992 to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope John Paul II had made special reference to the Peace Conference on the Middle East that had begun in Madrid where, for the first time, Arabs and Israelis had sat down at the same table and had agreed to speak on subjects that until then had been prohibited. Those Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and other similar bilateral peace negotiations between Israel and, respectively, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria had helped to create the context in which the Holy See and Israel had agreed to study and define issues of reciprocal interest at the meeting held at the Vatican on 29 July 1992.

18. However, along with those positive signs that were slowly taking shape, there were also strong indications that the daily life of many inhabitants of the region continued to be one of suffering, uncertainty and even despair. Many humanitarian agencies of the Catholic Church, in cooperation with UNRWA, were struggling to deal with the needs of refugees in the region. The number of those in need was increasing daily. International agencies such as Misereor, Missio, Kinderhilfen Bethlehem, Caritas Internationalis and others were working in conjunction with the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, providing resources for shelter, education, food, medical care and employment for those in need, regardless of creed or ethnic origin.

19. The return of Palestinians to the region after the Gulf war, at a time of economic uncertainty, had added to the Palestinians' problems of unemployment. The reports of UNRWA about the people that it served dovetailed with any detailed report that Catholic agencies could provide, since they all served the same purpose. The list of needs was long and, to those serving in the field, seemed endless when compared to the meagre resources available. Palestinians in the occupied territories, or Palestinian refugees in other countries of the region, were seeking answers to questions posed by

(Mr. Martino, Observer, Holy See)

settlements established in the occupied territories. Existing difficulties were exacerbated by the presence in the area of armies and armaments of terrifying dimensions, as well as the phenomenon of extremism, which capitalized on the suffering caused by instability, injustice and economic need in order to seize political control.

20. The Holy See was keenly aware that the peace process must take account of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples to a homeland where they could live in security and peace. A just, complete and lasting solution was urgently needed to give each what it rightly demanded and to a put an end to the dramatic situation that had lasted too long and which the community of nations had not faced with all due seriousness.

21. The same peace process must also pay close attention to the unique religious significance that the Holy Land had for Jews, Christians and Muslims, and to the special character of the City of Jerusalem. The problem must be resolved in such a way that no one was ever tempted to take up arms to conquer the Old City. The Holy See considered the problem of Jerusalem more from a viewpoint of values than territory. It asked that, regardless of how the problem of sovereignty was resolved and who would be called to exercise it, the Holy City should be given a special status with international guarantees, endowing it with adequate means for ensuring the preservation of its special characteristics, its Holy Places, the freedom to visit them, its religious and ethnic communities and their essential liberties, and also its city plan.

22. A joint statement issued on 14 January 1992 by all the Christian leaders in the Holy Land contained a detailed list of serious incidents that had recently occurred in the Holy City, and categorically condemned all attempts at modifying the unique demographic character and status of Jerusalem.

23. The international community should continue to support the activities of UNRWA and other agencies and non-governmental organizations on behalf of the Palestine refugees in the Middle East, and should work for the day when all such activities were unnecessary. On that day, the Holy Land and, in particular, Jerusalem would be the symbol of peace for all mankind.

24. Mr. ABOUL-NASR (Observer for the League of Arab States) said that the historic meeting held in Madrid in October 1991 had given rise to the hope that that and other meetings and talks between Arab and Israeli representatives would contribute to the settlement of the conflict in the Middle East. Optimism had increased following the election of a new Israeli Government, which had raised expectations of progress in the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Regrettably, those hopes had not materialized, and the sufferings of the Palestinians continued.

25. The reports of the Commissioner-General confirmed the constant deterioration of the situation of refugees and displaced persons, which was aggravated by the illegal practices and violations perpetrated by the Israeli

(Mr. Aboul-Nasr, Observer, League of Arab States)

authorities. In particular, the report covering the period between 1 July 1991 and 30 June 1992 (A/47/13) reflected a situation that had existed for years, with tragic circumstances for the occupied territories, since Israel continued to apply illegal and arbitrary measures, including curfews, the sealing of dwellings, the expropriation of land, as well as a policy of settling colonists in the occupied territories in order to alter the demographic structure of those territories.

26. Since its adoption of resolution 194 (III), the General Assembly had, every year, adopted resolutions in which it reaffirmed the right of refugees to return to their homes, and the need to respect the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and requested Israel to implement those resolutions. Since Israel continued to defy the United Nations, the Organization should take measures to implement its resolutions on the Middle East with the same seriousness and interest that it showed in other areas and, if it wished to maintain its credibility, should impose sanctions against States that did not respect those resolutions.

27. UNRWA was facing difficulties that were clearly described in the report; those difficulties were due both to the harassment of UNRWA employees by the Israeli authorities and to the levelling of their buildings. Nevertheless, UNRWA had continued to provide its humanitarian services to refugees. The League of Arab States valued that work and wished the Agency success, and it supported the proposal to extend the Agency's mandate for another three years and suggested that its headquarters should be relocated to Beirut.

28. In spite of the efforts of the Commissioner-General, the financial situation of UNRWA continued to be precarious. The United Nations had the responsibility of guaranteeing the continuity of UNRWA activities. To that end, he called upon Governments to contribute generously during the next period and thereby assist the peace process.

29. In spite of Israel's repressive practices, the will of the Palestinian people would not be broken but, on the contrary, would become stronger in order to defend its inalienable rights. The League of Arab States hoped that the current talks, as part of the peace process, would result in a broad and just settlement of the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.